

## Preserve and Strengthen Social Security

More than nine million veterans and their families receive retirement, disability, or survivor benefits from Social Security and, together, they comprise approximately 35 percent of the Social Security beneficiary population. Due to the recession caused by COVID-19, the Social Security trust funds will face a shortfall and be unable to pay full benefits a year earlier than previously anticipated, in 2034. If action is taken now, the current modest shortfall in long-term system funding can be addressed without damaging cuts to beneficiaries. This should be done through prudent, phased-in changes to the system's financing along with benefit enhancements that will respond to the nation's growing retirement crisis. Failure to act will mean that, once the trust funds are depleted, there will only be enough incoming revenue from payroll contributions to pay roughly 75 percent of all retirement, disability, and survivor benefits.

We support legislation that would set a more realistic cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) reflecting expenses frequently incurred by retirees and people with disabilities; reduce the tax burden on beneficiaries; ensure no one retires into poverty by improving minimum benefits; and make long overdue adjustments in the financing mechanisms for the system. We also support measures to gradually eliminate the earnings cliff in Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and make other improvements to the Social Security Ticket to Work Program to remove barriers to work for disability beneficiaries. In addition, we believe it is time to eliminate the five-month waiting period not only for SSDI but also the two-year waiting period for Medicare. We also believe it is critical that the Social Security trust funds be stabilized by restoring the monies lost to the system during COVID-19 and steps be taken to protect workers who could face permanently lowered benefits resulting from catastrophic economic downturns such as that precipitated by the pandemic. In addition, we support other measures that will help people understand better the benefits to which they are entitled and protect them from fraudulent misuse of their Social Security identification number. Finally, PVA opposes changes to Social Security and Medicare through mechanisms like an unaccountable "special commission" that could put forth proposals harmful to beneficiaries.

### PVA Position

- Congress must pass legislation that would establish the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E) as the metric for COLAs, set a minimum benefit above poverty level, apply Social Security payroll premium contributions to high-income earners to close the funding gap, and make other improvements in benefits necessary to protect those who rely on this vital social insurance.
- Congress must pass legislation that would end the five-month wait for SSDI once someone is determined eligible and end the two year-wait for Medicare for those beneficiaries.
- Congress must pass legislation to prevent an unintended reduction in benefits due to the severe recession and record unemployment caused by COVID-19.
- Congress must pass legislation that would require the Social Security Administration to send statements out so that Americans can be informed about their future benefits and to provide a single point of contact for any individual whose Social Security account number has been misused.
- Congress should avoid making changes to Social Security and Medicare through mechanisms like special commissions that risk damaging cuts to benefits without any accountability.